

Journal of Feminist Scholarship

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Fall 2011*

Article 16

Fall 2011

The Rise and Fall of Western Homophobia

Eric Anderson
University of Winchester

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs>



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Anderson, Eric. 2018. "The Rise and Fall of Western Homophobia." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 1 (Fall): 80-94. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol1/iss1/16>

This Viewpoint is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Feminist Scholarship by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

VIEWPOINT

The Rise and Fall of Western Homohysteria

Eric Anderson, University of Winchester

Abstract: In this essay, I draw upon my pro-feminist background to describe the formulation of the concept of homohysteria and explain its heuristic utility in conceptualizing historical shifts in heterosexual men's gendered regimes. I suggest that in times of high homohysteria, heterosexual men are compelled to align their identities and behaviors with orthodox (hypermasculine) notions of men's masculinity. This is in order to avoid homosexualization. Conversely, heterosexual men retain considerably more gendered freedom in times of low or no homohysteria. I describe this as a cultural process related to homophobia and define the term homohysteria as men's fear of being homosexualized, through association with feminized behavior. I suggest that there are three elements necessary in its production: (1) mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation, (2) a cultural Zeitgeist of disapproval of homosexuality, and (3) the conflation of femininity with homosexuality. I then show how, through identity politics, homohysteria can eventually give way to less homosexually panicked masculinities, something I describe as inclusive masculinities.

Keywords: gender, homohysteria, homosexuality, inclusive masculinities, masculinity

Copyright by Eric Anderson

Gender has long been implicated with sexuality (Seidman 2003). Like gender, sexual identities are also socially constructed and continuously contested (Flowers and Buston 2001) categories of social power (Foucault 1984). Occurring against a backdrop of homophobic social stigma, heterosexuality maintains hegemonic dominance (Rich 1981; Rubin 1984). But the stigma associated with men's homosexuality reflects more than just the dislike of sex between men: male homosexuality is also disparaged because it is culturally conflated with femininity (Barrett and Pollack 2005; Kimmel 1994; Nardi 1995; Pronger 1990), something Schwartz and Rutter (1998) describe as the gender of sexuality.

Boys (Epstein, O'Flynn, and Telford 2001; Pollack 1999) and men (Anderson 2005a; Messner 1992) wishing to avoid homosexual stigma generally do not work (Williams 1995) or play (Adams 1993; McGuffey and Rich 1999) in feminized terrains, or act in effeminate ways (Kimmel 1994) if they desire to be perceived as heterosexual and masculine (heteromasculine) among peers. Accordingly, boys and men traditionally position themselves away from femininity to show they are not feminine and therefore not gay (Anderson 2005a; McGuffey and Rich 1999). Epstein et al. (2001, 135) note, "Even little boys are required to prove that they are 'real boys' in ways that mark them as masculine, even macho, and therefore (by definition) heterosexual." Hence, homophobia does more than just marginalize gay men; it also limits the behaviors of many straight boys and men.

The promotion of a heterosexual form of men's masculinity is theorized (Connell 1987) as promoting a patriarchal dividend. For most males, however, the desire to be associated with a hegemonic form of heterosexual masculinity has more to do with the personal avoidance of stigma than with the promotion of all men over all women. The desire to be perceived as heteromasculine is understandable in a culture that distributes privilege unequally according to gender and sexuality (Connell 1987; Lorber 1994). Consequently, when heterosexual boys and men fear the stigma of homosexuality, they normally conceal

their homosocial intimacy. This is because same-sex intimacy is normally conflated with a homosexual identity in North American and Western European cultures (Anderson 2005a; Nardi 1995).

Accordingly, heterosexuals and homosexuals wishing to be thought heterosexual are compelled to avoid associating with anything coded as homosexual. This is accomplished through the repeated association with cultural codes of heterosexuality and disassociation from codes for homosexuality. This promotes the degradation of gay men and women, alike.

But what happens when, collectively, heterosexual male youth cease to care about whether their male friends are gay or straight? What happens when heterosexual men proudly adopt the codes of homosexuality and thus remove the homosexualizing agency from them? What benefit might this have on male patterns of stratification and women?

In this article, I theoretically explore the notion of *homohysteria*, contextualizing it within its historical-temporal frame. I do this in order to help understand how a Western notion of men's masculinity has shifted from permitting homosocial intimacy to prohibiting it and then (most recently) back to accepting it again. I suggest that a decrease in cultural homohysteria has positive impacts on the partial erosion of sexual and gender binaries. While the data I use to support my arguments come from white, working-class youth, the theoretical concept should apply to varying demographics of boys and men.

Modern Bromance

Jake is a sixteen-year-old, ostensibly heterosexual male. He lives in a somewhat impoverished neighbourhood in Bristol, England, with his mother and sister. Jake, however, has a rich network of friends, both male and female. For example, Jake publicly expresses his love for his best mate, Tom (who is of the same socioeconomic and racial background). He exuberantly expresses his love for Tom, on Facebook, to his mates in person, and to me (as a researcher). In fact, he expresses his love for his best mate as much as he does love for his girlfriend (of over a year), something easily verifiable by examining his Facebook posts. Here, Jake speaks of Tom in endearing terms, openly identifying his friendship as love. This intimacy, oftentimes described as "bromance," simulates ancient notions of Greek and Roman brotherhood; a time in which men's homosocial bonds were culturally prized (Spencer 1995).

Jake is not alone in his outright expression of love for his friends. The florid language that Jake uses to describe Tom is not at all unusual in contemporary British youth culture. In research on English working and middle class, white, sixth-form students (McCormack and Anderson 2010), we show that the style of men's masculinity most esteemed among these youths approximates what I call inclusive masculinities (2009). We show that a decrease in homophobia simultaneously permits an expansion of heteromasculine boundaries, so that boys are able to express physical tactility and emotional intimacy without being homosexualized by their behaviors.

Illustrating this, Jake told me that he was preparing to go on a thirteen-day holiday to Spain with Tom. When I inquired as to whether he feared that they might fight being together this long, he answered, "No mate, we're too close for that."

"Fair enough," I responded. "And what does the girlfriend think of the fact that you're taking your best mate on holiday, and not her?"

"She knows how close we are, she's gotta share me."

While Jake still lives in a heterosexist culture, it at least permits him to have the same level of emotional and physical intimacy with his best male friend as it does with his female partner. For example,

Jake tells me that he has a busy weekend coming up. He's spending Friday night with his girlfriend, including sex and cuddling, as she will be staying the night. He will then be spending Saturday night with Tom, doing all of the same activities with the exception of sex. He informs me that he and Tom sleep in the same bed, a very regular practice for young men in England (Anderson 2009). They oftentimes cuddle, something confirmed by forthcoming research where my research assistant and I find that twenty-nine of thirty undergraduate men (in one university class in England) have cuddled with another man. In fact, Jake spends as many nights in bed with Tom as he does with his girlfriend.

"Look at this message Tom sent me yesterday," Jake tells me with pride.

He hands me his mobile phone and I read the message aloud, "Love you, this week has made me realise how weak I can be without you. And I don't like not being with you :/x."

"Oh, your girlfriend is sweet," I tell him.

"No, that's from Tom," he states matter-of-factly.

"What did you respond?" I ask. Jake laughs.

"K., but a half hour later I sent him a message saying I was just kidding and that I appreciated his text and felt the same way." I then asked Jake to forward the text to me for my research.

What is interesting about Jake's story, however, is that he is not alone in expressing this type of homosocial intimacy. Jake does not think his friendship any different than the friendships his peers share with their best male friends. For Jake, this type of emotional intimacy is commonplace, something McCormack shows in his forthcoming book from Oxford University Press (2012), *The Declining Significance of Homophobia*. Here McCormack shows that boys in England today express physical tactility to show their love in ways unheard of between heterosexual boys in the 1980s (Pollack 1999). In Britain today, it is a normal experience for heterosexual boys to sleep together in the same bed, not because they have to, but because they desire to. Here, they bond not just over talk of cars, girls, and video games, but also over disclosing secrets and building intimacy. They bond over intimacy the way men once used to over a century ago.

Abraham Lincoln: Exemplifying Prehomophobia

In 1999, playwright and AIDS activist Larry Kramer told Salon Magazine, "There's no question in my mind [Lincoln] was a gay man and a totally gay man. It wasn't just a period, but something that went on his whole life."

I had little trouble believing this when I read it. A few years earlier I had early read a biography about the sixteenth president, revealing that Lincoln maintained a deep relationship with a same-sex friend, James Speed. Explicating this in a 1999 Salon Magazine article, author Carol Lloyd writes (<http://entertainment.salon.com/1999/04/30/lincoln/>):

The 28-year-old traveler was tall, with rough hands, a chiseled jaw and unforgettable, deep-set, melancholy eyes. He arrived in town, his worldly possessions in two battered suitcases, and inquired at a general store about buying some bedding. But the price was far beyond his budget. The strikingly handsome 23-year-old merchant took pity on the man and invited him into his own bed, free of charge, which happened to be just upstairs. The traveler inspected the bed and, looking into the merchant's sparkling blue eyes, agreed on the spot. For the next four years the two men shared that bed along with their most private fears and desires.

I frequently used Lincoln as an example of a gay man when describing historically influential sexual minorities. When my students inevitably protested, I simply pointed out to them his four-year bed-

sharing with Speed. I added that Lincoln continued to share a bed with multiple other boys and men well into his years as a statesman. None of my students contested this evidence.

To my male students of the mid 1990s, sharing a bed with another man as a permanent feature of one's living arrangement served as indisputable evidence that one was gay. Supporting this, when I began coaching in the late 1980s (Anderson 2000), my high school students did not want to share a bed when the team travelled, not even for one night. Because it was an economic necessity, they frequently heterosexualized themselves to their bed-sharing peer, "You better not make a move on me." From this perspective, Abraham Lincoln's willingness to sleep in the same bed with another man clearly identified him as gay.

Although I did not know it at the time, Larry Kramer, my students, and I were all making judgements concerning the past based on our current *Zeitgeist*. I made my Lincoln-as-gay analysis through a contemporary lens, something historians call presentism. However, I would later name the lens of viewing bed sharing, or any other form of physical or emotional intimacy between men, as being indicative of same-sex desire, homophobia. I suggest that homophobia exists as a product of a homosexually panicked culture in which homosuspicion permeates (2009).

John Ibson: A Century of Picturing Men

Professor of American Studies, John Ibson (2002) thought he hit the jackpot. Ibson found, for sale, photographs taken at the dawn of professional photography, photos of men posed together. Although clothed, the men in the photos were positioned intimately. Recognizing them as gay ancestors, Ibson was delighted to learn that the vendor he purchased them from had many others to sell—all capturing a similar level of tactile intimacy between men. The outright visibility of gay men one hundred years earlier fascinated Ibson. Had sexuality historians missed something about turn-of-twentieth-century America? Ibson embarked on a quest to find more photographs so that he could, perhaps, rewrite gay history.

However, somewhere between collecting his first few photographs and his final collection of over 5,000, Ibson figured out that these were not necessarily gay men pictured. Instead, they were perhaps heterosexual men doing what heterosexual men did at that temporal moment in American culture, expressing affection for a friend.

After years of careful analysis—and in what must be the most significant yet underappreciated gender studies book ever written—Ibson used his collection of 5,000 photos to describe the history of men's relationships from the 1880s until the 1980s. Ibson was very careful not to explain what the photographs mean to us today, but rather what they meant to the subjects at the time the photos were taken. Specifically, Ibson used the photos to illustrate the changing nature of physical intimacy between men in response to the cultural contextualization of homosexuality in modern society.

For example, his book contains images of athletes before the 1920s, as well as friends, servicemen, brothers, and collegiate and prep-school boys in many settings. The boys and men are lavishly dressed or provocatively undressed, wrapping arms around each other, embracing, lying in piles, sleeping in the same beds, holding hands, and sitting on each other's laps in order to show their affection for one another.

It was these photos (and Ibson's astute analysis) that heavily influenced my thinking about the role of homophobia in producing gendered behaviors and men's masculinities (2009). The photographs he collected suggested that the gradual awareness of homosexuality as a static identity (not just an abhorrent behavior) resulted in an equal growth in cultural homophobia.

This was temporally displayed in the photographs, which, when organized by passing decades, clearly

suggested that as American culture grew increasingly aware of homosexuality, men began to pry intimacy away from fraternal bonding. This mass awareness of homosexuality, combined with social homophobia, increased men's fear of being falsely homosexualized by their behaviors, attitudes, emotions, or associations. Accordingly, as the awareness of homosexuality grew (in the presence of homophobia), so did the space between men.

This growing distance between men is clearly illustrated through multiple subsets of the photographs Ibson collected. Through them, Ibson showed that cultural space was being added between men in many walks of public and private life. However, none were more germane than the photographs of men's sports teams. Here, Ibson uses images of teams to illustrate the evolution of the team portrait and the consequential growing rigidity that athletes displayed through the passing years. For example, prior to the 1920s, the photographs showed athletes hugging, laying their heads in each other's laps, holding hands, or draping their arms around each other. Soon after, however, teams appeared in the now familiar structure of rows. Men first stand with their hands at their side; years later, their arms are folded across their chests.

I use the photographs in Ibson's book while lecturing on men's masculinity, finding them immensely useful. They provide impactful visual evidence regarding the relationship between homophobia and male intimacy. They help one understand that homophobia has greatly limited the expression of gender and intimacy among all men. However, the progression of the photographs also made me wonder how and why the existence of a homosexual identity came to be in Western cultures. The answer, I propose, largely began with the conviction of famed British author and playwright Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde: Establishing a Gay Identity

Although little is known about premodern women's sexualities, it is largely believed that the sexual desire of one man for another was an acceptable, often venerated, form of love in ancient cultures. Intolerance toward homosexual behavior grew particularly in the Middle Ages, especially among adherents of Christianity and Islam.

To understand the wider cultural impact of homophobia, awareness of the general societal consensus on the nature of homosexuality is necessary. In Western cultures in the later nineteenth century, some psychologists began to view homosexuality as more than a temporary behavior—instead, understanding it as an immutable aspect of one's life.

One can imagine that agrarian life was lonely for gay men. Finding homosexual sex and love in pastoral regions was likely difficult. However, the industrial revolution brought structural/demographic changes in the form of migration, which provided population density and therefore anonymity (Cancian 1987). As industrialization brought migration from rural to urban areas, the greater density of people in cities permitted same-sex attracted individuals to organize (initially under the cloak of anonymity), which ultimately led to greater visibility and the scientific study of homosexuality. It was perhaps because of the anonymity the city provided that gay culture could begin to flourish (Spencer 1995).

This coincided with a growing body of scholarly work from Westphal, Ulrichs, and Krafft-Ebing, early pioneers of the gay liberationist movement. These scholars sought to classify homosexual acts as belonging to a *type* of person: a third sex, an invert, or homosexual (Spencer 1995). From this, they could campaign for legal and social equality.

Previously, there were less entrenched heterosexual or homosexual social identities. In other words, a man performed an *act* of sodomy, without necessarily being constructed as a sodomite. Under this new

theorizing, however, homosexuality was no longer a collection of particular acts, but instead, as Foucault (1984, 43) so famously wrote:

We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized—Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as its date of birth—less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.

The 1895 conviction of Oscar Wilde for “gross indecency” animated this newly created deviant identity. So extensive was the media coverage and public discussion around the trial of Britain’s celebrated author and playwright, that it breathed public awareness into homosexuality and consequently engendered elevated social homophobia. In Wilde, homosexuality found a spokesperson.

All of this is to suggest that the cultural awareness that some men existed as a different type of sexual person, a homosexual, came into existence during this period. Thus, one might describe the trials of Oscar Wilde, not only as giving birth to modern homophobia, but also as contemporary homohysteria.

Sigmund Freud: Explaining Homosexuality as the Product of Men’s Feminization

Whereas Wilde put a face on homosexuality, Sigmund Freud explained its etiology. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud theorized that sexuality was not innate. Instead he suggested that childhood experiences influenced men to become heterosexual or homosexual, which he called inversion. Homosexuality, Freud said, was a process of gendered wrongdoing, particularly through the absence of a father figure and an overdomineering mother. In one of his footnotes he wrote, “the presence of both parents plays an important part. The absence of a strong father in childhood not infrequently favors the occurrence of inversion” (146). Freud even gave child-rearing tips to help parents lead their children to heterosexual adjustment.

Freud’s theories are certainly more complex than I present, but what’s important toward the understanding of homohysteria is the process of explaining how homosexuals came to be. It is here that Freud cemented the notion that an absent father and/or an overdomineering mother could make boys homosexual.

This created a moral panic among Victorian-thinking cultures (Kimmel 1996). It seemed that industrialization had structurally created a social system designed to make children “inverts” because it pulled fathers into the factories and away from their families for large periods of time. Accordingly, in this *Zeitgeist*, what it meant to be a man began to be predicated in not being like one of those sodomites, inverts, or homosexuals (Kimmel 1994).

Accordingly, one condition of homohysteria was met: there must be mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation. Freud and Wilde created this cultural awareness. Wilde exemplified what it meant to be a gay male through his flamboyancy, and this culturally cemented men’s femininity as a signal for homosexuality. Freud explained how this came to be.

The next major contribution to the development of a homohysterical culture came through the work of Alfred Kinsey. It is here that the second antecedent of a homohysterical culture emerges.

Alfred Kinsey: The Development of Homophobia

Largely regarded as the first sexologist, Alfred Kinsey's book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* ([1948] 1998), received considerable cultural attention (and scrutiny). Key to my discussion of homophobia is not that he showed high frequencies of infidelity or masturbation, but that Kinsey reported that 10% of the American population was either homosexual or had such tendencies.

It is possible that Kinsey got higher response rates to homosexuality than any research that followed because he took a more aggressive approach. In a face-to-face memorized interview script, Kinsey and his associates privately asked of the men they studied, "How many times have you had sex with a man?," and not, "Have you had sex with a man?" When the participant said that they had not, Kinsey refused to believe it. This is a more aggressive approach than sex researchers use today (Laumann, Gagnon, and Michaels 1994). But what is important about Kinsey's research for my theory of homophobia is not whether his 10% figure is correct—but instead, it is that people *believe* it to be correct.

Thus, with Wilde, we had an identity of what it meant to be a gay male (i.e., feminine); with Freud, we had an understanding of what made one gay (absence of the father); and with Kinsey, we learned that 10% of men were gay. Thus, Kinsey's research began the processes of men looking to their homosocial groups, knowing that one in ten must be gay and speculating as to who it was. This homophobia, however, remains just speculation. This is because, apart from "acting feminine," nobody could (or can) accurately determine who is straight.

Reagan, AIDS, and Rambo: Homophobia of the 1980s

It would be difficult to call the 1950s, 60s, and 70s gay-friendly. But Western cultures hit an apex in both homophobia and homophobia in the 1980s. This period ended the heterosexualizing veil that muscularity and masculinity alone could bring to closeted gay men. The stereotype of the flamboyant gay man certainly remained, but the public understood that this was just one form of homosexuality. This was because the gay community was hit by two substantial sociopolitical events that raised the general public's exposure to homosexuality (Peterson and Anderson forthcoming). These events impacted not only gay masculinities (Levine 1998) but men's gendered understanding as a whole. The first came in the form of a backlash to the gains made by gay men and feminists of the 60s and 70s.

The 1980s ushered in a revival of fundamentalist, homophobic, and patriarchal religious fundamentalism. At a time in which church attendance began to decline, the advent of cable television brought various ministries into millions of living rooms. Christianity used the hysteria about homosexuality to milk money from callers who could donate with their credit cards over their new push-button phones. Christianity found political purpose in Anita Bryant, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and other perpetrators of inequality. Unfortunately, this further helped inspire Christianity to move from the pulpits and into the political arena.

The true propellant for homophobia, however, came in the form of a virus. In the early 1980s AIDS brought such visibility that it solidified in every citizen's mind that homosexuals existed in great numbers. It secured a public awareness that homosexuals lived and worked alongside "the normal" in every social institution. The ubiquitous presence of gay men could no longer be denied; they were dying in normal families in great numbers. Homosexuality was now not only pathologized as a lack of masculinity, but it was associated with viral genocide (Peterson and Anderson forthcoming). Gay men were now stigmatized as being both effeminate and diseased. This stigmatization, combined with the religious right's crusade to demonize homosexuality, meant that Americans were hell-bent on having yet another crisis in men's

masculinity (Kimmel 1996). Heterosexual male gender roles were to be recalibrated through organizations like Promise Keepers, films like *Rocky*, and a cowboy president in Ronald Reagan.

Freud's explanation of homosexuality as the product of an absent father figure found renewed emphasis in the 1980s. The "men's movement" of the AIDS era was, just as it had been during the early part of the twenty-first century, a way for men to distance themselves from what one was not to be. This time, however, Americans (in particular) had more than just a religious reason to "prevent" homosexuality; it was now epidemiological.

Loftus (2001) uses *General Social Survey* (GSS) data to show that throughout the 1970s, an average of 70% of Americans said that homosexuality was always wrong, but those numbers increased to 77.4% in 1988). Other studies are even more dramatic. For example, a Gallup poll shows that in 1985, 44% of Americans thought homosexuality should be legal, but that number dropped to 33% in 1987 (Loftus 2001).

Attitudes toward homosexuality have been substantially and consistently better in Britain than in the United States. Still, the US trend of rising homophobia throughout the 1980s is paralleled in Britain. I have previously shown (Anderson 2009) that the *British Social Attitudes Survey* shows that in 1983 (the first year the question was asked), 49.5% of the population said that homosexuality was always wrong. However, that number climbed to 63.6% in 1987. In other words, either 1987 or 1988 seems to be the apex of homophobia in both countries.

The point is that homophobia steadily grew in Western societies as the awareness of homosexuality did. AIDS severely elevated homophobia because scores of dying gay men proved how ubiquitous gay men were. And, as almost everyone knew now that homosexuality existed, heterosexual men felt compelled to distance themselves from the highly stigmatized homosexual identity. Homophobia therefore remained at its all-time high during this period, and gender signs coded as "feminine" consequently edged toward extinction. Thus, the 1980s created a culture in which men were compelled to publicly align their social identities with heterosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) in order to avoid homosexual suspicion.

Understanding Homophobia

I use the term homophobia to describe the fear of being homosexualized, as it incorporates three variables: (1) mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation, (2) a cultural Zeitgeist of disapproval towards homosexuality, and (3) disapproval of men's femininity because it is associated with homosexuality (i.e., feminine men are thought gay). This creates a need for men to publicly align their social identities with heterosexuality (compulsory heterosexuality) in order to avoid homosexual suspicion. In other words, a homophobic culture might look disparagingly at homosexuality, but without mass cultural suspicion that one might be gay, it is not homophobic. Thus, fundamental to the creation of a culture of homophobia is the necessity of public awareness that reasonable and "normal" people can also be homosexual.

There are many cultures in which people know that homosexuality exists, and where homosexuality is reviled, but in which they also do not believe that it can exist among their friends and family or even within their community, culture, or religion. For example, in 2007, President Ahmadinejad of Iran said to an American audience, "In Iran we don't have homosexuals like in your country." Thus in Iran, like many other non-Western countries, homosexuality is known to exist but mostly as a Western construct.

This cultural denial of the existence of homosexuality gives males in those cultures social permission to

display homosocial gendered behaviors, such as physical tactility, that are unacceptable in homophobic cultures. Thus, boys can hold hands in many countries but not the United States. These prehomophobic cultures have not yet had their Oscar Wilde and Kinsey moments.

Conversely, a homophobic culture is characterized by a viscous game of homophobia. I have previously called this “fag not it” (Anderson 2005a) as young boys know that someone must be gay, and they therefore point fingers at others to reduce their own homophobia. When one adds homophobia to the social understanding that homosexuality exists in great numbers and that it is not easily identifiable by one’s aesthetics or negated by one’s religious affiliation, we have a culture of homophobia.

I argue that the awareness of homosexuality existing as a static trait, an unchanging sexual orientation, was first thrust into Anglo-American culture through the visibility of the Wilde trials. However, the unusual aesthetic appearance that Wilde represented, and his penchant for aesthetic art and beauty, helped formulate homosexual suspicion only for men who resembled Wilde’s flair. This stabilized the stereotype of the homosexual for decades, excusing all others of homosexual suspicion unless they acted in Wildean ways. Under this model, James Dean or Rock Hudson are not suspected of maintaining sexual desire for men, while Harvey Fierstein and Stephen Fry are. Quite simply put, what this means is that if members of a culture do not believe that homosexuality is possible, there is no need to prove to one’s peers that one is not gay. Consequently, men are given more freedom of gendered expression.

While Kinsey made us aware of the ubiquity of homosexuality, it was only abstractly. If one was living with his best friend for fifteen years, they were still considered bachelor roommates, and not homosexual, as long as they didn’t represent the Oscar Wilde archetype. But this changed in the 1980s. Here, with normal men dying in normal families, the veneer of heterosexuality that average masculinity brought wasn’t enough. Now, anybody could be gay. Accordingly, men tried to prove to their peers that they were not one of the 10% by adopting and valuing the most extreme masculine behaviors.

Ibson measures this homophobia through decades of photographs, but another way comes from studies of idealized men’s body sizes. Flawless men’s bodies of the late 80s and early 90s were increasingly buffer (think of Rambo and the Terminator) than in decades prior. This idealization served to show that one was not gay and not effeminate (Pope et al. 2000).

What is significant to gender scholars is that the new age of masculinities studies emerged during the epoch of heightened homophobia of the 1980s and early 1990s. Embedded in this new sociology of men’s masculinities was the role of homophobia in constructing heteromascularity and the use of sport in accomplishing this. Don Sabo was one of the first to tackle the issue, publishing *Jock: Sports and Male Identity* in 1980, which was shortly followed by R. W. Connell publishing *Gender and Power* in 1987, in which she applied hegemony theory to the study of masculinities. Michael Messner and Don Sabo’s highly influential edited volume *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives* was published in 1990, the same year that Brian Pronger published *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality and the Meaning of Sex*. Messner’s next book, *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem with Masculinity*, came out in 1992, and Michael Kimmel’s highly influential chapter, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” was published in 1994. His influential book, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, came out two years later in 1996.

These scholars, and others, set the framework from which the new sociology of masculinities developed. As Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) point out, men’s studies of the 1970s failed to account for the importance of men’s heterosexuality in retaining male domination, as well as the importance of gay men’s masculinity in undermining it. Profeminist men and women, Messner, Sabo, Kimmel, Pronger, and

Connell, understood this.

The extreme homophobia of the period in which these scholars emerged means that they were keenly aware of the utility of homophobia in polarizing genders, limiting men's behaviors, and homosexualizing those who dared to be different. If homophobia was not as prevalent during this period, however, one wonders whether the model Connell conceptualized to describe the positioning of masculinities in relationship to dominance would include a hegemonic archetype and/or whether it would have been as influential in the masculinities literature.

Thus, as influential as hegemonic masculinity theory has been to sports and men's masculinities literature, it is also a product of homophobic culture. If, however, the Western world were to lose its homophobia, hegemonic masculinity theory may no longer be an appropriate model for understanding the relationship between men and their masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Moving toward Posthomophobia: Inclusive Masculinities of the New Millennium

If AIDS did anything positive for the gay community, it started us talking about homosexuality from a "rights" perspective. Then, as the virus later took hold in the heterosexual community, the stigma it brought to those infected slowly began to wane, bringing a further emancipatory call for gays and lesbians. This is not to say that AIDS was not (and is still not) overly associated with homosexuality or that it is not still stigmatized, but today we are at least more nuanced in our understanding that AIDS is not caused by homosexuality. As this occurred, social attitudes began to change.

The late 1990s and first decade of the new millennium have seen the political labor of feminist and queer identity politics come to fruition. Sexual minorities have come together under an umbrella of coalition politics to promote not only equality in legislation (i.e., the overturning of sodomy laws and the advancement of gay marriage), but also to erode cultural homophobia. For example, the percentage of British citizens saying that homosexuality is always wrong has dropped a few percentage points each year. In 2006, just 23.7% of respondents on the *British Social Attitudes Survey* maintained that homosexuality was always wrong. In the United States, the *General Social Survey* shows that matters improved ten points when Clinton took office in 1993 (Anderson 2009). That number has slowly but steadily decreased a few percentage points each year, and in 2006, 56.2% of Americans thought that homosexuality was always wrong. However, only 42% of those aged 18-30 years said that homosexuality was always wrong in that same year, and they were matched by 41% who said that it was not at all wrong (Anderson 2009).

I have advanced my career by examining the changing nature of men's gendered behaviors as homophobia and homophobia diminish. In studying young men in both the United States and the United Kingdom, I show that today's white, undergraduate men (particularly athletes) are eschewing the homophobic orthodox masculinity of the 1980s. Instead men are establishing homosocial relationships based on (1) increased emotional intimacy, (2) increased physical tactility, and (3) decreased violence and sexism. I argue that these improving cultural conditions result in decreasing homophobia among adolescent males.

I show that inclusive masculinities are gaining cultural, institutional, and organizational power among white, middle-class, university-attending heterosexual men (Anderson 2009). Most of the youth I study are distancing themselves from the corporeal pissing contest of muscularity, hyperheterosexuality, and masculinity of the 1980s, something evidenced through the sexualization of young, thin boys in mainstream culture. One no longer needs to be muscular and violent, and one no longer needs to be a team sport athlete, to be popular (McCormack 2011a).

Data from my dozens of ethnographic studies of heterosexual men in both feminized and masculinized spaces support this. After spending the previous decade researching openly gay athletes (Anderson 2011), fraternity men (Anderson 2008a), football (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack 2010) and soccer players (Anderson and Adams 2011), cheerleaders (Anderson 2005b, 2008b), rugby men (Anderson and McGuire 2010), and a host of other groups of university-aged men (Anderson, McCormack, and Lee 2011; Anderson, Adams, and Rivers 2010) on both sides of the Atlantic, the evidence suggests that inclusive masculinities are increasingly dominant in university and sixth-form settings (McCormack 2011b) and that the homophobia, misogyny, violence, and homosocial separation associated with orthodox masculinity are increasingly unfashionable (McCormack and Anderson 2010). Collectively, this research suggests that we at least need to be measured in our claims when we generalize about the orthodox nature of undergraduates and university athletes in Anglo-American cultures.

I do not, however, claim that inclusive masculinities, of which one characteristic is being free of homohysteria, are completely free of oppression and subordination. A diminished state of homohysteria is not to be mistaken as a gender utopia. Men categorized as belonging to one archetype of a set of inclusive masculinities might still be heterosexist (McCormack and Anderson 2010); they might still sexually objectify women (Anderson 2008b); they might still value excessive risk taking (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack 2010); and they might still use homophobic discourse without intent to wound (McCormack 2011c). Furthermore, I have not analyzed race, religiosity, or other demographic variables (with the exception of class) as important variables of social stratification alongside my research into these new inclusive masculinities. So generalizations are necessarily limited.

My data do, however, indicate that in the process of proliferating inclusive masculinities, gender itself, as a constructed binary of opposites, may be somewhat eroding. I argue that the efforts of the first, second, and, now, third waves of feminism—combined with the gay liberationists and gay assimilationist efforts of the past four decades—are slowly withering at the gender binary (Anderson 2009). Increasingly, gender is the business of decreasing polarization, at least for white undergraduate men.

This has sociopositive implications for the tolerance of gay men, as well (Bush, Anderson, and Carr, forthcoming). Many of the long-held codes, behaviors, and other symbols of what separates masculine men from feminized men (who were therefore homosexualized) are blurring, making behaviors and attitudes increasingly problematic to describe as masculine or feminine, and thus, gay or straight (Anderson 2008b). Yesterday's rules no longer seem to apply. The codes of gay are increasingly adopted by heterosexuals and, therefore, become meaningless as symbols of sexuality. There is also evidence to suggest that this maintains sociopositive impact for the manner in which straight men relate to women (Anderson 2008a), viewing them as friends in gendered equality.

Homohysteria as a Macrolevel Heuristic Tool

The gendered history I show occurring in Western cultures is useful for explicating my notion of homohysteria. I developed the concept organically but also in response to the need to delineate varying types of homophobia beyond the traditional homophobia-heterosexism binary. The term helps us understand why when two sixteen-year-old boys hold hands in the United States, they are policed by homophobia, but why when the same two boys hold hands in many Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures, they are not met with epithets of homophobia—while these nonetheless remain homophobic cultures. In other words, homohysteria helps us understand that homophobia has a very different effect on men when people believe that someone they know can be gay.

The inability of the concept of homophobia to explain this variance highlights the need for more sociological analysis, and corresponding terminology, to theorize the impact of homophobia on these varying cultures. This was my original intent in developing the concept of homohysteria under my larger theoretical umbrella of inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson 2009).

While research validates the utility of homohysteria as a heuristic tool in Western cultures (Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012), it is also possible that the term homohysteria might be linked to larger concepts of identity politics. Specifically, I suggest the concept might be useful in both charting and predicting what will occur in various cultures concerning their relationship to homosexuality. For example, it is currently understood that the Internet, alongside the hegemony of American television and film, has made other (highly homophobic) cultures aware that homosexuality exists. While this is frequently attributed to be a problem endemic in white cultures, the awareness that homosexuality exists within these cultures is growing. Uganda serves as a prime example. Here, homosexuality is thought to be a product of white culture; nonetheless, the government (influenced by American Christian leaders) is currently positioning to make homosexuality punishable by death. It is likely that as awareness spreads that Ugandans can be gay, sixteen-year-old boys will not be holding hands soon. One can only hope that after decades of identity politics, matters will improve.

Conclusion

Gender has long been implicated with sexuality, and the trials of British writer Oscar Wilde, who in 1895 was convicted of gross indecency (male homosexual behavior), furthered this belief. The unusual aesthetic appearance that Wilde represented, alongside his penchant for aesthetic art and beauty, helped formulate homosexual suspicion for men who shared Wilde's feminine flair. Wilde's conviction thus helped promote the stereotype that homosexuality existed among feminine men, thereby erroneously disqualifying masculine-acting men from homosexual suspicion.

The power of homophobia is that homosexual individuals often feel culturally compelled to misrepresent their sexuality (something known as being "in the closet") in order to avoid social stigma. However, homophobia also impacts heterosexuals, as it is impossible to definitively prove one's heterosexuality. Accordingly, heterosexuals and homosexuals wishing to be thought heterosexual are compelled to avoid associating with anything coded as homosexual. This homosexual panic is accomplished through repeated association with cultural codes of heterosexuality and disassociation from codes for homosexuality.

Conversely, the suspicion that someone is a homosexual has often been cast upon whoever displays gendered behaviors coded as appropriate for the opposite sex. For men, competitive team sports, violence, cars, beer, and an emotionless disposition have been associated with masculinity (and thus heterosexuality), while men with an appreciation of the arts, fine food, individual sports, and emotional expressionism have been associated with femininity and, therefore, ultimately homosexuality. This equation is reversed for women.

The awareness that homosexuality exists (largely because of the work of Alfred Kinsey and then four decades later because of HIV/AIDS), coupled with a high degree of homophobia, creates a culture of homohysteria. In this homosexually panicked culture, it is believed that anyone might be gay, and as a result, heterosexuals' social, sexual, and personal behaviors are limited because men fear association with femininity and women fear association with masculinity.

In a homohysterical culture, individuals are concerned with proving their heterosexuality because

homosexuality is stigmatized. Conversely, when cultural homophobia is so great that citizens do not generally believe that homosexuality is even possible (as in many contemporary Middle Eastern, African, and Asian cultures), there is no need to prove to one's peers that one is not gay. It is in this type of culture that boys and men can express emotional and physical intimacy between same-sex peers.

Homophobia should therefore maintain heuristic utility in analyzing both local and global cultures. Although more work needs to be done in the area, we may find that cultures transgress from a disposition of disbelief that homosexuality exists within to a recognition that members of that culture can be/are in fact gay. It is unlikely that this awareness will be met with acceptance, as these are also cultures of fundamentalist faith. Thus, it is likely that multiple other cultures will experience a temporal shift away from emotional and physical intimacy between men to one of homophobia. It will then likely take a coalition of identity politics to begin to undo such hysteria.

References

- Adams, Mary Louise. 1993. "To Be an Ordinary Hero: Male Figure Skaters and the Ideology of Gender. In *Men and Masculinities*, edited by T. Haddad, 163-181. Toronto: Canadian School Press.
- Adams, Adi, Eric Anderson, and Mark McCormack. 2010. "Establishing and Challenging Masculinity: The Influence of Gendered Discourse in Football." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 29 (3): 278-300.
- Anderson, Eric. 2000. *Trailblazing: The True Story of America's First Openly Gay Track Coach*. Hollywood: Alyson Publications.
- _____. 2005a. *In the Game: Gay Athletes and the Cult of Masculinity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- _____. 2005b. "Orthodox and Inclusive Masculinity: Competing Masculinities among Heterosexual Men in a Feminized Terrain." *Sociological Perspectives* 48 (3): 337-55.
- _____. 2008a. "'I Used to Think Women Were Weak': Orthodox Masculinity, Gender Segregation, and Sport." *Sociological Forum* 23 (2): 257-80.
- _____. 2008b. "'Being Masculine is Not about Who You Sleep With...': Heterosexual Athletes Contesting Masculinity and the One-Time Rule of Homosexuality." *Sex Roles* 58 (1-2): 104-15.
- _____. 2009. *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*. New York: Routledge.
- _____. 2011. "Updating the Outcome: Gay Athletes, Straight Teams, and Coming Out at the End of the Decade." *Gender & Society* 25 (2): 250-68.
- Anderson, Eric, and Adi Adams. 2011. "'Aren't We All a Little Bisexual?': The Recognition of Bisexuality in an Unlikely Place." *Journal of Bisexuality* 11 (1): 3-22.
- Anderson, Eric, Adi Adams, and Ian Rivers. 2010. "'I Kiss Them Because I Love Them': The Emergence of Heterosexual Men Kissing in British Institutes of Education." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Online First.
- Anderson, Eric, Mark McCormack, and Harry Lee. 2011. "Male Team Sport Hazing Initiations in a Culture of Decreasing Homophobia." *Journal of Adolescent Research* (July 4, 2011). doi:10.1177/0743558411412957.
- Anderson, Eric, and Rhidian McGuire. 2010. "Inclusive Masculinity and the Gendered Politics of Men's Rugby." *The Journal of Gender Studies* 19 (3): 249-61.
- Barrett, David, and Linda Pollack. 2005. "Whose Gay Community? Social Class, Sexual Self-Expression, and Gay Community Involvement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 46: 437-56.
- Bush, Ant; Anderson, Eric & Carr, Sam forthcoming. "The Declining Existence of Men's Homophobia in British

- Sport." *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*.
- Cancian, Francesca. 1987. *Love in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. 1985. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 14 (5): 551-604.
- Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R. W., and James Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19 (6): 829-59.
- Epstein, Debbie, Sarah O'Flynn, and David Telford. 2000-2001. "'Othering' Education: Sexualities, Silences, and Schooling." *Review of Research in Education* 25: 127-79.
- Flowers, Paul, and Katie Buston. 2001. "'I was Terrified of Being Different': Exploring Gay Men's Accounts of Growing Up in a Heterosexist Society." *Journal of Adolescence* 24: 51-65.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1, *An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1905. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Vol. 7 of *Complete Psychological Works*. London: Hogarth.
- Ibson, John. 2002. *A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books.
- Kimmel, Michael. 1994. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." In *Theorizing Masculinities*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, 223-42. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kimmel, Michael. 1996. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin. [1948] 1998. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Levine, Martin. 1998. *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lloyd, Carol. 1999. "Was Lincoln Gay?" Salon.com. <http://entertainment.salon.com/1999/04/30/lincoln/>.
- Loftus, Jeni. 2001. "America's Liberalization in Attitudes toward Homosexuality, 1973 to 1998." *American Sociological Review* 66 (5): 762-82.
- Lorber, Judith. 1994. *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- McCormack, Mark. 2011a. "Hierarchy without Hegemony: Locating Boys in an Inclusive School Setting." *Sociological Perspectives* 54 (1): 83-101.
- _____. 2011b. "The Declining Significance of Homophobia for Male Students in Three Sixth Forms in the South of England." *British Educational Research Journal* 37 (2): 337-53.
- _____. 2011c. "Mapping the Terrain of Homosexually-Themed Language." *Journal of Homosexuality* 58 (5): 664-79.
- _____. 2012. *The Declining Significance of Homophobia: How Teenage Boys Are Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McCormack, Mark, and Eric Anderson. 2010. "'It's Just Not Acceptable Any More': The Erosion of Homophobia and the Softening of Masculinity in an English State School." *Sociology* 44 (5), 843-59.
- McGuffey, Shawn, and Lyndsey Rich. 1999. "Playing in the Gender Transgression Zone: Race, Class, and Hegemonic Masculinity in Middle Childhood." *Gender & Society* 13: 608-10.

- Messner, Michael. 1992. *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- _____. 2002. *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Messner, Michael, and Don Sabo. 1990. *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Nardi, Peter. 1995. *Gay Men's Friendships*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peterson, Grant, and Eric Anderson. Forthcoming. "Queering Masculine Peer Culture: Softening Gender Performances on the University Dance Floor." *Journal of Men's Studies*.
- Pollack, William. 1999. *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myth of Boyhood*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Pope, Harrison, Katharine Phillips, and Roberto Olivardia. 2000. *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*. New York: Free Press.
- Pronger, Brian. 1990. *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5: 631-60.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole S. Vance, 267-319. London: Routledge.
- Schwartz, Patricia, and Virginia Rutter. 1998. *The Gender of Sexuality*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Seidman, Steven. 2003. *The Social Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Norton.
- Spencer, Colin. 1995. *Homosexuality in History*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Williams, Christine. 1995. *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do "Women's Work"*. Berkeley: University of California Press.